# Compartmentalized reference list in an academic publication: Helping the reader to gain a more comprehensive understanding of an academic paper

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## Introduction

In this technical report-type paper, we introduce a new provocative idea about a *compartmentalized reference list* of the tertiary sources in academic writing (journal articles, conference papers, theses, etc.). Depending on the type of research, especially in the case of qualitative studies, the analyzed research data can be collected from interviews, video clips, drawings, pictures, brochures and other non-academic writing and documents, and Internet sources, among other sources.

In the cases in which the data sources have been added to the reference list of academic publications, the non-academic sources added may cause confusion for the reader. It has also happened that some articles have received negative feedback because of abundant non-academic sources, although the intended meaning was to represent multiple sources of research data used in the study. This misinterpretation is naturally a consequence of careless reading, but in the case of reviewing or evaluation, the damage is already done from the author's point of view.

This could be avoided by compartmentalizing the reference list. A compartmentalized reference list means dividing the reference list according to commonly accepted themes. We propose that the main themes could be *related literature* and *data material*. Related literature would be based mainly on previous research, mostly consisting of academic publications. On the other hand, the data material would consist of qualitative-type sources mentioned above.

Secondly, in many cases a researcher may try to find assistance for methodological solutions for his/her own study. This can be done by trying to find similar research approaches, or trying to find essential methodological references from other studies. Therefore, we propose *methodological literature* as a third theme for the compartmentalized reference list. Furthermore, separating the methodological literature in a reference list can give a reader or reviewer a quick overview about the depth of the paper's methodological approach.

For some reason, this simple principle has not been used, at least according our knowledge, in the academic literature. Besides its usefulness and advantages, it is notable that even according to principles of bibliography, there should not be any conflicts in using an explanatory compartmentalized reference list in academic papers. Bibliography is a broad concept with different meanings. In this paper, we have narrowed the concept of "bibliography" to concern only the organized listing of literature (Carter and Barker 2005), also referred to as "enumerative bibliography" (Krummel 1988). In practice, the compartmentalized reference list is positioned somewhere between traditional enumerative (not necessarily numbered; organization can also be alphabetical by some agreed-upon characteristics, mostly by author) bibliography (Krummel 1988) and annotated bibliography (which includes a short description of each reference (Speck et al. 2008), just more informative than a traditional reference list and lighter than an annotated one.

Tertiary sources under each theme are naturally arranged in alphabetical order. An example of the use of the compartmentalized reference list is shown below. The introduced themes are bolded and italicized in the model.

## Model of compartmentalized reference list

### *RELATED LITERATURE*

Abimbola, T., & Vallaster, C. (2007). Brand, organizational identity and reputation in SMEs: an overview. Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, 10 (4), 341–348.

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## METHODOLOGICAL LITERATURE

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## DATA MATERIAL

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Fried, J. (2009a). Jason Fried of 37signals at BIG Omaha 2009. A presentation at the BIG Omaha event. [video clip]. Retrieved from http://37signals.com/speaks (Accessed 1.2.2011).

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## Acknowledgements

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